Wisdom from The Book of Jonah.

# Transforming Trauma

## How God Heals Through Panic, Prayer, Peace, and Perspective.

Dr. Lawrence Chen

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Lawrence Chen, Ph.D.

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# Dedication

This book is dedicated to those who have carried more than they were meant to carry, and who are learning, slowly and bravely, to lay it down.

To those who have stayed when leaving would have been easier.

To those who are discovering that survival is not the same as peace.

And to the God who remains present, even in the unfinished places.

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*“And should I not have concern…?”*

*— Jonah 4:11 (NIV)*

*“Should I not have compassion?”*

## Preface

# How to Read This Book Safely and Well

This book was written for people who carry wounds — some remembered, some unnamed, some long buried under faithfulness, competence, or silence. If you are reading this because something in you feels tender, overwhelmed, weary, or unfinished, you are not alone — and you are not late.

Before we begin, it is important to say clearly what this book is and is not.

This book is not a program to fix you.

It is not a test of spiritual maturity.

It is not a demand to remember everything, feel everything, or heal quickly.

This book is an invitation.

An invitation to notice what has shaped you.

An invitation to listen to your body and soul with compassion.

An invitation to discover the story of Jonah and your own story. Story of how God meets people not after they are healed, but while they are wounded.

Because trauma affects each person differently, you are always in control of your pace as you read. Some chapters may resonate deeply. Others may feel distant or uncomfortable. You are free to pause, skip practices, return later, or simply read without doing anything at all.

Throughout the book, you will find reflection questions and practices. These are optional. They are offered as supports, not

requirements. If a practice brings up strong emotions, confusion, or distress, it is not a failure to stop. It is wisdom. You are encouraged to return to grounding practices, seek trusted support, or take a break.

God is not grading your honesty.

God is not measuring your courage.

God is present whether you feel calm, anxious, numb, hopeful, or unsure.

This book assumes a simple but profound truth: healing unfolds best in safety, relationship, and time.

May these pages become a companion — not a pressure — as you walk your own path of transformation.

# Chapter 1

# The Nature of Trauma

## Part 1: Trauma

Trauma is not defined by how dramatic an event looks from the outside.

It is defined by what happens inside a person when safety is overwhelmed and the body cannot fully recover.

For some, trauma is tied to a single moment of terror or loss.

For others, it forms slowly—through chronic stress, emotional neglect, spiritual pressure, or environments where vulnerability was unsafe. Many people carry trauma without having words for it, sensing only that something feels tight, reactive, or distant inside.

Trauma is not a personal failure.

It is a protective response.

When the nervous system perceives threat—whether physical, emotional, relational, or spiritual—it shifts into survival mode. Attention narrows. The body mobilizes energy to fight, flee, freeze, or endure. These responses are not chosen. They happen automatically, often faster than conscious thought.

What makes trauma persist is not the original event alone, but what happens after—when the body remains on guard, when stress responses do not fully settle, when safety is not restored. Over time, the nervous system may learn to expect danger even in ordinary situations.

This is why trauma often shows up in places we don't expect:

in relationships,

in prayer,

in conflict,

in rest,

in moments that ask us to trust.

Trauma is not “just emotional.”

It affects how the brain processes information, how the body holds tension, how the heart anticipates connection, and how the soul approaches God.

Many people try to address trauma by correcting behavior or strengthening willpower. But trauma does not live primarily at the level of choice. It lives in the body’s memory of what was once overwhelming. Healing, therefore, does not begin with trying harder. It begins with understanding what happened and restoring a sense of safety.

**PRACTICE: GROUNDING AND ORIENTATION**

Pause for a moment and notice your body.

Name silently where you are and what is supporting you.

Take three slow breaths, letting your exhale lengthen.

You are not trying to change anything—only to notice.

## Part 2: Trauma and the Biblical Imagination

Scripture is filled with people who encounter God while afraid, overwhelmed, resistant, numb, or exhausted. The Bible does not present human beings as calm, consistent, or emotionally regulated. It presents them as real.

When we read Scripture through a trauma-aware lens, we begin to notice how often God meets people in states of survival, not after they have resolved them. God speaks to people who are hiding, running, arguing, despairing, or shutting down.

This does not mean Scripture is a clinical manual. It means Scripture is honest about the human condition.

The story of Jonah is one such example. Jonah is not introduced as a villain or a hero. He is introduced as a person who hears a call that his inner world cannot yet hold. His flight is not explained away—nor is it immediately condemned. The story makes space for complexity.

Reading Scripture this way does not lower spiritual expectations.

It deepens compassion.

**PRACTICE: IGNATIAN CONTEMPLATION OF SCRIPTURE (JONAH 1)**

Read Jonah 1 slowly, once or twice.

Imagine yourself within the scene—not to analyze, but to notice.

What do you sense in your body as the story unfolds?

Where do you feel closeness or distance from God?

## Part 3: Symptoms Beyond Behavior

Trauma is often misunderstood because its effects can be subtle and inconsistent. A person may appear competent, faithful, or high-functioning while quietly living in a state of tension or emotional constriction.

Some common trauma-shaped patterns include:

heightened anxiety or irritability

emotional numbness or withdrawal

difficulty resting or feeling present

strong reactions that feel disproportionate

spiritual dryness, fear, or avoidance

These are not signs of weak character or immature faith. They are signs of a nervous system that learned how to survive.

Spiritual practices can sometimes intensify these patterns when they are used to override the body instead of listening to it. This is why healing requires integration, not separation—attention to body, mind, relationships, and faith together.

**PRACTICE: GENTLE SELF-INVENTORY**

Without judgment, notice which patterns feel familiar.

Which reactions seem to arise automatically?

What might your nervous system be trying to protect you from?

## Part 4: The Christian Response to Suffering

Christian theology has always held space for lament, grief, and unanswered questions. The psalms are full of voices that cry out without resolution. Jesus himself responds to suffering not with explanations, but with presence.

A trauma-informed faith does not rush people toward meaning before safety. It does not pressure forgiveness before trust. It does not interpret suffering as a test to be passed.

Instead, it begins with this truth:

God is near to those who are overwhelmed.

God does not require you to be calm before being loved.

God meets people as they are, not as they should be.

**PRACTICE: MEDITATION ON THE CROSS**

Imagine placing your suffering gently before Christ.

Notice that you are not asked to explain, justify, or fix it.

Rest in presence rather than answers.

## Part 5: Why Jonah?

Jonah's story is not a model of ideal obedience. It is a story of resistance, fear, prayer, anger, and grace—told without neat conclusions.

Jonah runs.

Jonah shuts down.

Jonah prays imperfectly.

Jonah struggles with God's compassion.

And still, God remains present.

Jonah's journey offers us a mirror rather than a measuring stick. It allows us to explore how trauma shapes our reactions to God, to others, and to ourselves—without demanding that we resolve everything at once.

As we move forward, you are not asked to identify with Jonah in every way. You are invited only to notice what resonates, what feels distant, and what stirs curiosity. That is enough.

**PRACTICE: REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS**

What parts of Jonah feel familiar to me?

Where do I notice resistance, avoidance, or fatigue?

What feels tender or unfinished right now?

## Chapter 1 Closing Reflection (Optional)

If it feels supportive, pause before moving on. You are not required to carry everything forward at once.

Notice one word, image, or phrase that lingers, and hold it gently.

# Chapter 2

# Finding Stability in the Storm

## Part 1: Introducing the Window of Tolerance

When people speak about being “triggered,” they are often describing a nervous system that has moved outside its window of tolerance.

The window of tolerance describes the range within which a person can think, feel, and respond without becoming overwhelmed. Inside this window, emotions are manageable. The body feels relatively steady. Thought and feeling can coexist. A person can remain present without shutting down or becoming flooded.

Outside this window, survival responses begin to dominate.

Trauma narrows this window. Experiences that once felt tolerable may now feel overwhelming. Stress may arise more quickly. Recovery may take longer. This does not reflect a failure of resilience or faith. It reflects how the nervous system adapted when safety was uncertain.

Jonah’s storm is not only external. It mirrors what can happen internally when the window of tolerance is exceeded. The wind rises. The sea churns. The crew panics. Order dissolves. What was once manageable becomes overwhelming.

Jonah does not respond with strategy or prayer. He goes below deck and falls into a deep sleep. This is not indifference or spiritual apathy. It reflects a nervous system that has reached its limits.

Understanding the window of tolerance allows us to read Jonah

with compassion rather than judgment. His behavior reflects a system pushed beyond capacity.

**PRACTICE: NOTICE YOUR WINDOW**

Pause and notice your current state.

Does your body feel steady, activated, or depleted?

Without changing anything, simply observe.

## Part 2: Hyperarousal and Jonah

Hyperarousal is a state of mobilization for danger.

When the nervous system enters hyperarousal, the body releases stress hormones. The heart rate increases. Muscles tense. Attention narrows toward perceived threat. Hyperarousal prepares the body to fight or flee.

In Jonah's story, hyperarousal appears throughout the ship. The sailors panic. They shout. They throw cargo overboard. They pray urgently to their gods. The deck becomes a place of escalating fear.

Hyperarousal does not always appear as visible panic. It may present as irritability, urgency, control, or relentless productivity. For some trauma survivors, hyperarousal becomes a chronic baseline—always scanning, always braced, always anticipating something going wrong.

Jonah's absence from the chaos suggests that his nervous system has moved beyond hyperarousal and into another state.

**PRACTICE: NAMING ACTIVATION**

Recall a recent moment of urgency or tension.

Where did you feel it in your body?

What action did your system prepare you for?

## Part 3: Hypoarousal and Silence

Hypoarousal is a state of shutdown.

When the nervous system enters hypoarousal, energy decreases. Awareness narrows. The body may feel heavy, slow, or numb. Speech may diminish. This is not rest. It is conservation.

Jonah asleep in the hold of the ship illustrates hypoarousal. While chaos continues above, Jonah withdraws below deck. Sleep reflects reduced activation because engagement feels inaccessible.

Hypoarousal often carries shame. People may be labeled lazy, disengaged, or unfaithful. But hypoarousal is not apathy. It is protection.

Jonah's silence signals that he has reached the limits of his capacity.

**PRACTICE: GENTLE ENERGY CHECK**

Notice whether your energy feels high, low, or steady.

If low, what might your body be conserving?

Offer yourself permission to move slowly.

## Part 4: Expanding the Window of Tolerance

Healing does not eliminate hyperarousal or hypoarousal. These responses are part of human physiology. Healing involves expanding the window in which presence can be maintained.

The window widens through repeated experiences of safety—not through willpower, discipline, or moral effort. Repeated moments of being met and supported allow the nervous system to learn new expectations.

Jonah's window does not expand in the storm. It expands later, after he is contained and given time. Before insight comes safety. Before meaning comes survival.

Grounding practices are not tools for control or self-improvement. They are invitations back into tolerable presence.

**PRACTICE: GROUNDING RESET**

Place both feet firmly on the floor.

Slow your breathing slightly.

Name five things you can see.

## Part 5: Spiritual Regulation — Faith Practices and the Nervous System

Spiritual practices can either regulate or dysregulate the nervous system.

Practices that emphasize performance, urgency, or moral pressure tend to increase activation. Practices that emphasize presence, rhythm, and consent tend to support regulation.

Jonah's prayer does not emerge until he is inside a holding place. He does not pray his way into safety. He prays because safety has already been established.

Practices that may support regulation include slow, honest prayer; silence without expectation; breath-based prayer; and Scripture read gently, without demand.

Prayer that supports regulation is not about correctness. It is about connection.

**PRACTICE: RETURNING TO THE WINDOW**

Sit comfortably and notice your breath.

Ask quietly: *Am I within my window right now?*

Say: *I am allowed to return.*

Take one slow breath before continuing.

## Chapter 2 Reflection

When do I notice myself becoming overwhelmed or shutting down?

What helps me recognize when I am outside my window of tolerance?

How have spiritual practices supported—or disrupted—my sense of safety?

You do not need to answer these questions immediately. Let them accompany you.

# Chapter 3

# When the Body Remembers

## Part 1: The Body Keeps the Story

Trauma is not stored only in memory.

It is stored in the body.

Long after an event has passed, the body may continue to respond as if danger is still present. Muscles tense without conscious intention. Breath becomes shallow. The heart accelerates before the mind can make sense of why.

This is not imagination.

It is memory without words.

The body remembers what the mind cannot yet organize. Trauma fragments experience in ways that make linear recall difficult, but the nervous system continues to carry the imprint.

Jonah's story is filled with bodily movement before it contains much reflection. He runs. He descends. He sleeps. He is thrown into the sea. His body tells the story before his mouth does.

For trauma survivors, this often feels confusing or frightening. Reactions appear without warning. Emotions arrive without context. The body seems to betray the mind.

But the body is not betraying you.

It is trying to keep you alive.

Healing begins when the body is listened to with curiosity rather than control.

**PRACTICE: NOTICING THE BODY**

Pause and notice your posture.

Where do you feel tension or ease?

Take one slow breath and simply observe.

## Part 2: When Our Pain Affects Others

This part of Jonah's story invites a difficult but necessary reflection.

Our unprocessed pain often affects others—even when we do not intend it to.

Jonah's silence places the sailors at risk. Not because he is cruel or indifferent, but because he is overwhelmed. His nervous system is shut down. He is not capable of engagement.

This is not an invitation to shame.

It is an invitation to responsibility held with compassion.

Healing does not begin with blaming ourselves for harm we never meant to cause. It begins with honesty—recognizing that what we carry deserves care, not concealment.

Pain that is not held finds other places to land.

Jonah's story does not accuse him. It simply shows the cost of suffering carried alone.

**PRACTICE: RELATIONAL AWARENESS**

Consider a recent interaction.

Were you within your window of tolerance?

What might have supported greater steadiness?

## Part 3: When Truth Is Safer Than Silence

Silence can protect us—until it does not.

There comes a moment when truth becomes safer than silence. Not because truth is easy, but because silence is costing too much.

Jonah eventually speaks. His words are brief. He does not explain himself. He does not justify or spiritualize what has happened. He names the reality as he understands it.

This simplicity matters.

Truth does not need elaboration to be faithful. It needs safety.

For trauma survivors, truth spoken too early can overwhelm. But silence held too long can isolate. Discernment lies in recognizing when honesty, even in small fragments, offers more safety than continued concealment.

Jonah's truth-telling does not fix the storm. But it restores relationship.

**PRACTICE: GENTLE TRUTH-TELLING**

Is there something small and safe you could name today?

What would it mean to speak honestly without overexplaining?

## Part 4: The Belly of the Fish Is a Safe Holding Place

The fish is not punishment.

It is containment.

Inside the fish, Jonah is no longer exposed to the storm. He is enclosed, limited, and held. Movement is restricted. Time slows. Demands lessen.

This is not rescue in a triumphant sense.

It is a safe holding place.

Trauma healing often requires this kind of containment—spaces where pressure is reduced and the nervous system can begin to settle. These spaces may feel uncomfortable or confining, but they offer protection.

The fish does not fix Jonah.

It gives him space to survive.

Holding comes before understanding.

Safety comes before change.

**PRACTICE: IMAGINING CONTAINMENT**

Picture a space where you feel protected.

What makes it feel steady?

Stay with that image for a few breaths.

## Part 5: From Survival to Prayer

Prayer does not begin with eloquence.

It begins with breath.

Jonah's prayer emerges only after containment. He does not pray his way into safety. He prays because safety has already been given.

This matters deeply for trauma survivors who have been taught that prayer must be offered even when the body is overwhelmed. Jonah's story suggests otherwise. Prayer follows safety. It does not precede it.

Prayer here is not performance.

It is connection.

And that is enough for now.

## Chapter 3 Reflection

Where do I notice my body responding before I understand why?

When has silence protected me—and when has it isolated me?

What kinds of holding spaces have helped me survive difficult seasons?

You are not required to resolve these questions. Let them remain open.

## Chapter 3 Practice: Settling After Activation

If this chapter stirred emotion, pause before moving on.

Place one hand where you feel steadiness—your chest, your abdomen, or another place that feels supportive.

Notice your breath without trying to change it.

*“I am held right now.”*

Remain until your body settles, even slightly.

# Chapter 4

# Prayer from the Depths

## Part 1: Prayer from a Fragmented Heart

Jonah's prayer does not come from clarity.

It comes from fragmentation.

He prays from inside the fish — from a place of confinement, fear, and disorientation. This matters. Jonah does not wait until his emotions settle or his theology aligns. He prays as he is.

God hears Jonah's prayer from a fragmented heart.

This tells us something essential about prayer. Prayer is not a reward for coherence. It is not reserved for moments of insight, gratitude, or certainty. Prayer emerges when something inside reaches out for connection.

For those shaped by trauma, prayer can become complicated. Words disappear. Images of God feel distant or unsafe. The body may tense rather than relax. Jonah's prayer reassures us that prayer does not require calm or clarity.

God hears silence as prayer, fragments as prayer.

Prayer is connection. And that is enough for now.

**PRACTICE: WRITING FRAGMENTED PRAYER**

Write a prayer without correcting yourself.

Allow incomplete sentences.

Do not search for resolution—only expression.

## Part 2: Lament as Raw Speech

Lament pours out rawness in God's presence.

Jonah's prayer is not gentle. It is not careful or restrained. It is full of distress, complaint, and desperation. He speaks of drowning, abandonment, and dislocation.

This kind of prayer is not polished.

It is real.

Lament allows suffering to be spoken without correction. It resists the pressure to make meaning too quickly. For trauma survivors, lament can be one of the safest forms of prayer because it does not demand resolution or gratitude.

God does not interrupt Jonah's lament.

God receives it.

This reception matters more than explanation.

**PRACTICE: LAMENT PRACTICE**

Name what feels heavy without explaining it.

Speak it aloud or write it plainly.

Allow the words to exist without fixing them.

## Part 3: Prayer and the Nervous System

Prayer is not only spiritual.

It is physiological.

When Jonah prays, his body is contained. The fish provides enclosure. The storm has passed. His nervous system has space to settle. Only then does speech return.

This sequence matters.

Prayer that emerges from safety supports regulation. Prayer demanded in the midst of overwhelm can deepen distress. Trauma-informed prayer respects timing. It allows silence. It allows breath. It allows the body to lead.

Prayer becomes less about saying the right words and more about staying present.

**PRACTICE: BREATH AND REGULATION**

Notice your breathing.

Allow your exhale to lengthen slightly.

Say quietly: I do not need to rush meaning.

## Part 4: Letting Meaning Wait

Jonah does not explain his suffering.

He does not draw conclusions or assign purpose. He names what he feels and where he is — and leaves meaning open.

Meaning is allowed to remain unresolved.

For many trauma survivors, pressure to “find meaning” arrives too early. This can feel invalidating or even cruel. Jonah’s prayer models another way. Meaning can wait. Relationship does not have to.

Jonah entrusts what he cannot yet understand.

And it is received.

**PRACTICE: LETTING MEANING WAIT**

Identify one unresolved question you carry.

Instead of answering it, place it gently before God.

Remain in silence for several breaths.

## Part 5: Prayer as Holding

Prayer does not extract Jonah from the fish.

It does not end the confinement immediately. What it does is sustain connection. Jonah remains alive inside the holding place.

Prayer becomes part of the holding.

For those whose prayers feel small, fragmented, or unfinished, Jonah's story offers reassurance. Prayer does not have to resolve anything to matter. It keeps relationship alive.

## Chapter 4 Reflection

What has prayer felt like for me in seasons of fragmentation or exhaustion?

Where have I felt pressure to pray “correctly” rather than honestly?

What helps me stay connected to God when words are limited or unavailable?

You are not meant to answer these questions fully. Let them accompany you.

## Chapter 4 Practice: Prayer as Connection

This practice is designed to support regulation, not insight.

1. Sit in a position that feels supportive.

2. Notice your breath without trying to change it.

3. If words come, let them be simple. If no words come, remain silent.

4. Place a hand where you feel steadiness, if that helps.

Say quietly, if it feels right:

*“I am here, and You are here.”*

Remain for a few breaths.

When you are ready, gently return to your surroundings.

# Chapter 5

# Peace That Supports Daily Living

## Part 1: Peace

Peace is often misunderstood.

Many people imagine peace as a feeling of calm or the absence of conflict. In this view, peace arrives when circumstances improve or emotions settle. But biblical peace is deeper and sturdier than emotional ease. It refers to wholeness — the ability to live without constant threat.

Jonah's story does not show him becoming calm. It shows him becoming steadier.

Peace, in this sense, is not the absence of strong emotion. Jonah remains capable of anger, resistance, and protest. What changes is not his emotional life, but his capacity to remain present without collapse.

For trauma survivors, peace often begins not as serenity but as relief. Relief that the body is no longer bracing for immediate danger. Relief that survival no longer requires constant vigilance.

Peace is the experience of enough safety.

**PRACTICE: DEFINING PEACE**

Write one sentence describing what peace has meant to you in the past.

Now write one sentence describing peace as capacity rather than calm.

Notice the difference.

## Part 2: Peace Is Not Avoidance

Jonah’s earlier withdrawal was not peace. It was avoidance.

Avoidance can feel peaceful in the short term. It reduces stimulation, conflict, and demand. But it narrows life. It shrinks possibility. Over time, avoidance can increase fear rather than relieve it.

Peace does not require disengagement from life. It allows engagement without collapse. This distinction matters for trauma survivors who have learned to survive by shutting down or disappearing.

Jonah’s movement back toward his calling does not indicate enthusiasm or certainty. It indicates capacity. He is able to re-enter the world without being overwhelmed by it.

Peace supports presence.

It allows a person to remain in relationship — even when emotions are mixed and circumstances unresolved.

**PRACTICE: NOTICING AVOIDANCE**

Where do you tend to withdraw under stress?

Does that withdrawal bring relief or constriction?

What would gentle re-entry look like?

## Part 3: Peace and the Body

Peace begins in the body.

A regulated nervous system allows wider perception, slower reaction, and greater choice. This does not happen all at once. It develops through repeated experiences of safety.

Jonah's peace grows gradually — through containment, prayer, and time. There is no dramatic turning point. Instead, there is steadiness where there was once collapse.

For trauma survivors, bodily peace may show up as:

slightly easier breathing

less urgency in response to stress

moments of rest that feel possible

These changes are subtle but significant. Peace does not erase anger or grief. It gives them somewhere to land without overwhelming the system.

**PRACTICE: BODY AND PEACE**

Notice your breathing.

Is it shallow or steady?

Allow one slow exhale.

## Part 4: Peace and Trust

Peace supports trust.

Not blind trust, and not naïve confidence. Peace supports embodied trust — the sense that one can remain present without being destroyed.

Jonah begins to trust that he can stay alive in God's presence even while conflicted. This trust does not eliminate resistance. It makes resistance survivable.

For many trauma survivors, trust is rebuilt not through belief statements but through experience. When the body learns that presence does not lead to harm, trust becomes possible again.

Peace creates the conditions in which trust can grow.

**PRACTICE: TRUST INVENTORY**

Where has trust slowly grown in your life?

What experiences made it possible?

Name one small sign of embodied trust.

## Part 5: Peace Supports Daily Living

Peace supports daily living.

It allows ordinary tasks to be done without constant strain. It supports rest, work, relationship, and discernment. It makes space for choices that are not driven solely by fear or urgency.

This kind of peace does not demand inspiration. It does not require emotional clarity or spiritual certainty. It is quiet and practical.

Jonah’s story suggests that peace is not a spiritual achievement. It is a gift that supports life as it is actually lived.

Peace does not solve everything.

It makes living possible.

## Chapter 5 Reflection

How do I usually define peace — emotionally, spiritually, or physically?

Where do I notice moments of steadiness, even if calm is absent?

What helps me remain present without collapsing or withdrawing?

You are not asked to force peace. Simply notice what is already present.

## Chapter 5 Practice: Noticing Peace

This practice focuses on *recognizing* enough peace, not maximizing calm.

1. Sit or stand in a way that feels comfortable.
2. Notice one place in your body that feels even slightly settled.
3. Do not try to expand it. Simply acknowledge it.

Say quietly:

"*This is enough for now.*"

Take one slow breath.

Allow yourself to move on without forcing anything more.

## Chapter 6

# Anger, Grace, and Staying in Relationship

### Part 1: Anger

Anger is one of the most misunderstood emotions in spiritual life.

Many people are taught, explicitly or implicitly, that anger is something to overcome, suppress, or confess away. In faith communities, anger is often framed as a spiritual failure rather than a human response. For trauma survivors, this framing can deepen shame and silence.

Jonah is angry.

He is not quietly disappointed or mildly frustrated. He is furious — at God, at the situation, at the mercy shown to others. The text does not soften this. And God does not withdraw.

This matters.

Anger often arises when something precious has been threatened or violated. It signals that a boundary has been crossed or that pain has not been acknowledged. In this sense, anger is not the opposite of faith. It is often what remains when hope feels dangerous.

### Part 2: Anger and the Body

Anger lives in the body.

It tightens the jaw. It heats the chest. It energizes muscles. This physical activation is not accidental. Anger prepares the body to

protect what feels endangered.

For trauma survivors, anger can feel frightening — either because it was punished in the past or because it feels overwhelming when it arises. Some learn to suppress anger entirely. Others feel consumed by it and fear what might happen if it is expressed.

Jonah's anger does not appear at the beginning of his story. It surfaces after survival, after prayer, after obedience. This sequence is important. Anger often emerges when safety returns and the body no longer needs to focus solely on survival.

This does not mean anger is a problem to solve. It is information to be listened to.

## Part 3: Anger Directed Toward God

Jonah does not hide his anger from God.

He speaks directly. He accuses. He names what feels unfair and intolerable. This kind of prayer can feel shocking to readers who have been taught to approach God only with reverence, gratitude, or restraint.

But Jonah's anger does not end relationship.

It sustains it.

Anger expressed honestly can be a form of connection. It keeps the conversation open. Silence, by contrast, can slowly erode relationship, especially when it is fueled by fear or resignation.

Jonah does not leave.

He stays and argues.

This staying matters more than resolution.

## Part 4: Grace Without Erasure

God responds to Jonah's anger with grace.

Not by correcting him.

Not by silencing him.

Not by demanding emotional change.

God asks a question.

This is a posture of grace — one that makes space without erasing Jonah's experience. Grace does not mean approval of harm or avoidance of responsibility. It means staying present without coercion.

For trauma survivors, grace is often experienced not as absolution, but as non-abandonment. It is the experience of being met without being managed.

God stays with Jonah even when Jonah is difficult.

## Part 5: Staying in Relationship

Jonah's story does not resolve his anger.

There is no clear moment of repentance or transformation. What the story shows instead is that anger does not end relationship with God. Jonah remains seen, addressed, and accompanied.

This challenges forms of spirituality that require emotional compliance. Faith does not require the absence of anger. It requires honesty held within relationship.

Staying matters more than settling.

Relationship endures even when questions remain unanswered.

## Chapter 6 Reflection

How was anger treated in the faith contexts that shaped me?

Where do I notice anger in my body before I notice it in words?

What would it mean to bring anger into God’s presence without censoring it?

You are not required to resolve these questions. Let them remain open.

## Chapter 6 Practice: Holding Anger Without Acting It Out

### PRACTICE: HOLDING ANGER WITHOUT ACTING IT OUT

This practice is about containment, not expression.

1. Sit or stand in a grounded position.

2. Notice where anger lives in your body, without trying to change it.

3. Place a hand near that area, if it feels supportive.

4. Take two slow breaths, allowing the exhale to lengthen slightly.

Say quietly:

*“This anger is telling me something.”*

Remain until your body settles, even a little.

# Chapter 7

# Returning Without Rushing

## Part 1: Re-entry

Re-entry is often harder than survival.

Many people imagine that once a crisis has passed, life simply resumes. The danger is over. The storm has ended. It should be possible to return to ordinary rhythms without difficulty. But for trauma survivors, re-entry can feel disorienting and fragile.

The world looks familiar, but the body has changed.

Jonah's return to land is not triumphant. He does not celebrate. He does not express relief or gratitude. He goes — carrying his unresolved experience with him.

Re-entry does not mean readiness.

It means movement with what remains.

For those shaped by trauma, returning often happens before confidence returns. This is not failure. It is reality.

## Part 2: Obedience Without Urgency

Jonah obeys God's call, but without enthusiasm.

This matters.

Obedience here is not fueled by clarity, conviction, or joy. It is shaped by capacity. Jonah does what he can, not what might be ideal or expected.

Trauma-informed faith recognizes that obedience looks different after overwhelm. It must move at the pace of safety rather than urgency. When obedience is pressured, it often triggers resistance or collapse.

Jonah does not change when he is pressured.

He moves when pressure subsides.

This suggests that obedience rooted in safety is more sustainable than obedience driven by fear.

## Part 3: Resistance as Information

Jonah resists even as he participates.

He goes to Nineveh, but he does not embrace the mission wholeheartedly. His reluctance remains visible. Rather than treating this resistance as failure, Jonah's story invites us to listen to it.

Resistance often carries information.

It may signal fear, grief, anger, or an unresolved wound. It may indicate that something inside needs care rather than correction. Resistance is not always defiance. Often, it is communication.

When people feel met with kindness, curiosity increases.

Defensiveness softens. Capacity expands.

God listens to Jonah's resistance rather than overriding it. The conversation continues.

## Part 4: God's Holding Does Not End

God's holding does not end when Jonah steps back into his calling.

It changes form — and it remains.

Jonah is no longer enclosed in the fish. He is exposed again — to people, conflict, and uncertainty. But God's presence continues through dialogue, provision, and attention.

This matters for trauma survivors who fear that safety will disappear once life resumes. Jonah's story suggests otherwise. Holding adapts. It does not vanish.

God remains attentive, even when Jonah remains conflicted.

## Part 5: Living with Tension

Jonah's story does not resolve tension.

He continues to struggle with compassion, justice, and grace. He remains troubled by God's generosity toward others. The book of Jonah ends without closure, leaving Jonah — and the reader — unsettled.

And yet, relationship remains.

Healing does not eliminate tension.

It makes tension livable.

Jonah's unfinished story offers permission to live without resolution — to stay engaged even when answers remain incomplete.

## Chapter 7 Reflection

What feels difficult about returning to ordinary life after strain or crisis?

Where do I notice resistance — and what might it be telling me?

What helps me re-engage without rushing myself?

Let these questions remain open. You are not meant to resolve them quickly.

## Chapter 7 Practice: Re-entering Gently

**PRACTICE: RE-ENTERING GENTLY**

This practice supports paced return, not performance.

1. Notice your body and breath.

2. Name one area of life you are re-entering — work, relationship, responsibility, or community.

3. Ask quietly: "*What is one small step that feels possible right now?*"

Say softly:

*"I am allowed to return at my own pace."*

Take one slow breath before continuing.

# Chapter 8

# Integration and Care

## Part 1: Integration — Living from What Has Healed

Healing is not something you leave behind.

It becomes something you live from.

By this point in Jonah's story, much has happened. He has been overwhelmed, held, prayed, resisted, obeyed, argued, and stayed in relationship with God. Nothing has been neatly resolved — and yet something real has shifted.

Integration is not improvement.

It is incorporation.

Jonah is not "better" in every sense. He is still capable of anger, resistance, and frustration. What has changed is how he carries these experiences. He can remain present longer. He can stay in conversation rather than flee or collapse.

For trauma survivors, integration often arrives quietly. You may notice that you recover more quickly after stress. You recognize limits earlier. You return to grounding with less effort. These are signs that healing has moved from crisis management into daily life.

Healing has not disappeared.

It has become support.

## Part 2: Rhythms of Care — Practices That Sustain Healing

Healing is not sustained by intensity.

It is sustained by rhythm.

Rhythms differ from routines. Routines often demand consistency regardless of capacity. Rhythms adjust to what is possible. They slow when energy is low and resume when space opens again.

This matters for trauma survivors, whose energy and availability can fluctuate significantly.

Care begins with the body. Sleep, nourishment, gentle movement, stillness, and predictable pauses are not optional luxuries. They are foundations.

Spiritual practices function best as holding practices rather than obligations. Breath prayer, silence, short honest prayer, Scripture read slowly, and reflective awareness support regulation when practiced gently and consistently.

A few minutes practiced often sustains more than long practices done rarely.

## Part 3: Community — Healing With and Among Others

Healing does not happen in isolation.

It may begin privately, but over time it seeks connection. This does not mean rushing into community. For many, community was where harm occurred. Caution is not avoidance. It is discernment.

Jonah is not immediately surrounded by people after his survival. First comes holding. Then stability. Only later does re-engagement appear.

Healthy community functions as a holding environment — where presence matters more than fixing, and boundaries are respected. Not every community can offer this. Healing adapts to

what is available.

Community may be one person.

It may be a therapist, a spiritual companion, or a trusted friend.

God works within what is possible.

## Part 4: Limits — Honoring Capacity Without Shame

Limits are not failures.

They are signals of life.

Trauma does not create limits. It makes them visible. Some people learn to override limits in order to survive. Others withdraw quickly to avoid harm. Both are strategies shaped by experience.

Learning to honor limits is not about becoming less capable. It is about becoming more honest about what is possible right now.

God does not shame Jonah's limits.

God works within them.

Limits protect energy, safety, and integrity. Ignoring them leads to collapse. Honoring them supports sustainable faith.

Sometimes honoring limits means saying no. This is not unfaithfulness.

It is wisdom.

## Part 5: Rest — Choosing Renewal Without Escape

Rest is not the same as stopping.

It is renewal without disappearing.

Jonah has already tried escape. Rest comes later — after safety and stabilization. God provides shade before resolution. Relief

arrives before explanation.

Rest does not bring answers.

It brings space.

Rest is often temporary. This is not failure. It reflects the rhythms of life. Rest comes and goes. What matters is returning to it when possible.

You are allowed to receive rest without guilt.

Rest keeps you engaged with life rather than withdrawn from it.

## Chapter 8 Reflection

Where do I notice healing quietly supporting my daily life?

What rhythms feel sustaining rather than demanding?

What limits am I being invited to honor right now?

You are not asked to solve these questions. Let them orient you gently.

## Chapter 8 Practice: Living from Support

**PRACTICE: LIVING FROM SUPPORT**

This practice focuses on recognition, not effort.

1. Sit comfortably and notice your breath.

2. Name one place in your life where healing supports you now — even in a small way.

3. Name one rhythm or limit that helps sustain that support.

Say quietly:

*“I live from what is holding me.”*

Take one slow breath before moving on.

# Chapter 9

# Living Forward

## Part 1: Hope — Noticing What Is Possible Again

Hope often arrives quietly.

For many traumatised individuals, hope does not feel like optimism or confidence. It does not announce itself as certainty or excitement. In fact, hope can feel risky — even dangerous — because hope implies openness to disappointment.

Jonah's story speaks otherwise.

Hope here is not an emotion.

It is possibility.

Jonah remains alive. He remains in conversation with God. The story does not close with resolution or triumph. It remains open. This openness is itself a form of hope.

Hope does not require believing that everything will be fine. It requires noticing that something is still possible — that relationship continues, that life has not ended, that the future is not entirely sealed.

For traumatised individuals, hope often begins as a small shift: a moment of relief, a return of curiosity, a sense that life might hold more than survival.

Hope does not push forward.

It waits to be noticed.

## Part 2: Transformation — Change Without Erasure

Transformation is often misunderstood as becoming someone new.

In this understanding, healing means leaving the past behind, overcoming wounds, or returning to a version of oneself that existed before trauma. Jonah's story offers a different vision.

Jonah is changed, but he is not erased.

His wounds remain part of his story. His anger, resistance, and complexity do not disappear. What changes is how he lives inside these realities. He is no longer running blindly. He is no longer collapsing in silence. He is able to remain in relationship — with God, with others, and with himself.

Jonah does not change because he is pressured or corrected.

Jonah does not change when he is shamed.

Jonah changes when he is allowed to remain.

Transformation unfolds slowly, unevenly, and without guarantees. It does not erase pain. It reshapes how pain is carried.

## Part 3: Compassion for Self — Living Without Self-Betrayal

Many people find it easier to extend compassion to others than to themselves.

Trauma often teaches self-betrayal. You learn to ignore your own needs, silence your instincts, and override your limits in order to survive. Over time, this becomes familiar — even automatic.

Self-compassion interrupts this pattern.

Self-compassion is not self-indulgence or avoidance of

responsibility. It is staying with yourself without erasure. It is refusing to abandon yourself when things are difficult or unfinished.

God models this posture with Jonah — listening, remaining, asking questions rather than issuing ultimatums. God does not demand that Jonah become someone else in order to stay in relationship.

Self-compassion allows healing to continue without violence toward the self.

## Part 4: Compassion for Others — Engagement Without Collapse

Compassion for others does not require losing yourself.

Trauma can distort compassion in two directions. Some overextend, taking responsibility for everything and everyone. Others withdraw entirely, protecting themselves through distance.

Jonah struggles here. He is deeply troubled by God's compassion for Nineveh. His resistance reveals how compassion can feel threatening when one's own wounds remain tender.

God does not force Jonah into compassion.

God holds what Jonah cannot.

This matters.

You are not required to carry what exceeds your capacity. Compassion that respects limits is more sustainable than compassion fueled by obligation or guilt.

Compassion that moves at the pace of safety endures.

## Part 5: Living Forward — Carrying Hope Without Pressure

Jonah's story ends without resolution.

There is no final lesson. No tidy conclusion. No clear indication that Jonah has changed his mind or resolved his anger. The book closes with a question — and with presence.

Living forward does not mean moving on.

It means carrying what remains without letting it define everything.

Living forward allows unfinished stories to stay unfinished. It allows tension to coexist with relationship. It trusts that God stays with what is unresolved.

You are allowed to take your time.

You are allowed to move slowly.

You are allowed to live without answers.

The story remains open.

## Chapter 9 Reflection

What does living forward look like for me right now?

Where do I feel pressure to resolve what remains unfinished?

What would it mean to trust presence more than progress?

You are not asked to decide anything. Simply notice what resonates.

## Chapter 9 Closing Practice: Living Forward Gently

**PRACTICE: LIVING FORWARD GENTLY**

This practice supports orientation, not direction.

1. Settle your body and notice your breath.

2. Name where you are — emotionally, spiritually, physically — without evaluation.

3. Release the need to know what comes next.

Say quietly:

*“Stay with me as I live forward.”*

Remain for a few breaths before concluding.

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# About the Author

Dr. Lawrence Chen is a psychologist, spiritual companion, and retreat leader who works at the intersection of trauma-informed psychology, Christian spirituality, and pastoral care. His work focuses on accompanying individuals and communities who are navigating faith in the aftermath of trauma, loss, burnout, and spiritual disorientation.

Grounded in Scripture and shaped by Ignatian spirituality, Lawrence brings a contemplative and trauma-sensitive lens to both psychological practice and spiritual formation, with particular attention to how the body, nervous system, and inner life shape faith, prayer, and discernment. He is especially concerned with forms of spirituality that do not require self-erasure, emotional bypassing, or premature resolution, and that make room for anger, resistance, doubt, and unfinished stories.

Lawrence has led retreats, workshops, and teaching sessions on trauma-informed spiritual practices, prayer, and self-care for pastors, priests, ministry leaders, and lay communities. His approach emphasizes safety, consent, and pacing, offering practices that support regulation, honesty, and sustained relationship with God.

He lives and works with a deep conviction that healing is not linear, that faith can remain real even when certainty is absent, and that God's presence does not depend on progress. This book grows out of years of clinical practice, pastoral listening, spiritual companionship, and prayerful reflection alongside those learning how to live forward without closure.

**Contact Info**:
Website: www.drlawchen.com

Email: drlawchen@proton.me